

# The Trinity in the New Testament

For the Father himself through the Word in the Spirit works and gives all things.  
Athanasius, *Ad Serapionem (Letters to Serapion)*, 3.5.

## Trinitarian Evidence in the New Testament

Is the Trinity in the New Testament? Yes and No: The New Testament *assumes* the reality of the Trinity.

### The Three Persons

“There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost” (WSC 6). These three Persons are distinct—without mixing or confusion, as the New Testament demonstrates.

#### God the Father

**Matthew** 11:25-27; 16:17; **Mark** 13:32; **Luke** 10:21-22; 22:29-30; **John** 1:14, 18; 2:16; 3:35; 4:23; 5:17-23, 26, 36; 6:57; 8:38-44; 10:30, 38; 14:2, 6, 9-11; 15:1; 16:26-28; 17:1, 5, 21; 18:11; 20:17, 21; **Romans** 8:14-17; 15:6; **1 Corinthians** 1:3; 8:6; **2 Corinthians** 1:2-3; 11:31; **Galatians** 1:4; 4:6-7; **Ephesians** 1:1-3; **Philippians** 1:2; 4:20; **Colossians** 1:2-3; **1 Thessalonians** 1:3; 3:11, 13; **2 Thessalonians** 1:1; 2:16; **Philemon** 3; **James** 1:17; **1 John** 1:2; 3:1, 9; 4:14.

#### God the Son

**Matthew** 1:18ff; 3:16-17; **Mark** 1:10-11; **Luke** 1:35; **John** 1:1-18; 3:16; 5:17; 8:24, 28, 58; 10:30; 13:19; 20:28 (For the I Am sayings, see Exodus 3:14. Also see the references above for Father—they reveal as much about the Son); **Acts** 13:32-33; **Romans** 1:3-4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 29, 32; 10:9; **1 Corinthians** 1:9; 8:6; 12:3; 15:28; **2 Corinthians** 1:9; **Galatians** 1:16; 2:20; 4:4, 6; **Ephesians** 4:13; **Philippians** 2:5-11; **Colossians** 1:13-15; **1 Thessalonians** 1:10; **Titus** 2:13; 3:4-7; **Hebrews** 1:1-4, 8; 2:9; **2 Peter** 1:1; **1 John** 5:20.

#### God the Holy Spirit

**Matthew** 10:20; 28:19; **Mark** 3:28-29; 12:32; 13:11; **Luke** 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 3:21-22; 4:1-2, 18; 24:49; **John** 3:1-8; 14:1-16:15; **Acts** 2:17, 33; 5:3-4; **Romans** 8:9-11, 26-27; 14:17-18; 15:16; **1 Corinthians** 2:11; 3:16; 6:19; 12:1-11; **2 Corinthians** 1:21-22; 3:3; 5:17; **Galatians** 3:11-14; 5:18; **Ephesians** 3:14-17; 4:30.

### The One Triune God

“These three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory” (WSC 6). Human language must be stretched to the breaking point to begin to describe the New Testament witness of the unity of the Godhead—**John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa (The Orthodox Faith)*, I.14:** “[The Persons] dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate courses within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but clinging to each other. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is not coalescence or commingling or confusion.”

#### Same Substance

The New Testament is clear that there is ONE God—the three Persons all possess the same Divinity (i.e., the “same substance”): **John** 1:1-4; 6:58; 10:30; 17:11, 21; **Philippians** 2:6; **1 Timothy** 2:5-6; **Hebrews** 1:2; 10:29.

#### Equal in Power and Glory

Scriptural order demonstrates the equality of the Three: **Acts 2:32-33**—Father, Son, Spirit; **1 Corinthians 12:4-6**—Spirit, Son, Father; **Galatians 4:4-6**—Father, Son, Spirit; **Ephesians 2:13-18**—Son, Spirit, Father; **Ephesians 4:4-6**—Spirit, Son, Father; **1 Peter 1:2**—Father, Spirit, Son; **Jude 20-21**—Spirit, Father, Son.

## Trinitarian Language

What about “problem passages”? Doesn’t Jesus say “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28)? Is Jesus greater than the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26)?

**Harold Brown, *Heresies*, 89, 91:** Inasmuch as the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity are embedded in the New Testament, although not explicitly formulated there, we must make the effort of wrestling with difficult terminology if we are not to fall an easy prey to misunderstanding or to actual heresy... . It will always remain a mystery, but... it can at least be expressed in such a way that we can see wherein the mystery lies.

# The Trinity in the Old Testament

[The New Testament] writers felt no incongruity whatever between their doctrine of the Trinity and the Old Testament conception of God. [They] certainly were not conscious of being “setters forth of strange gods.”

B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations*, 88.

## Is the Trinity in the Old Testament?

Yes and No: The Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament doctrine of the Trinity

### Major Passages Dealing with God’s Nature

**Gen 1:26-27**—Then God said, “Let us make man in **our image**, in **our likeness**, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in **his own image**, in the **image of God** he created him; male and female he created them.

Note: ‘Our’ cannot refer to God and the angels, because man was made in the image of God. Throughout the OT, the Hebrew for “God” is *Elohim*—a plural! God occasionally refers to Himself with a plural pronoun (us, we, etc.), for example: Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8.

**Deut 6:4-5**—Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is **one**. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Note: In this passage, the Hebrew for ‘one’ is *echad*, which refers to unity (i.e., “one flesh” in Gen 2:24). Hebrew has a different word for numerical individuality, *yachid*.

**Isa 9:6**—For to us a **child** is born, to us a **son** is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And *he will be called* Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

### Some Other Passages that Foreshadow the Trinity

*The Word of God (or Wisdom of God) is often personified—this points to Jesus, the Word (John 1).*

Gen 1:3	Ps 33:6, 9	Ps 147:18	Ps 148:8	Joel 2:11	Job 28:23-27
Prov 8:22 ff	Prov 3:19	Jer 10:12	Jer 51:15	and others...	

*The Spirit of God is also personified, pointing to the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 1 Cor 2:10).*

Gen 1:2	Ps 33:6	Ps 104:33	Ps 139:7	Job 26:13	Job 33:4
Is 40:7, 13	Is 59:19	Is 63:10	and others...		

*The Bible often makes distinctions in the Divine Being, pointing, not to new gods, but to a Triune God.*

Gen 19:24	Ps 33:6	Ps 45:7	Ps 110:1	Is 61:1	Is 63:9-12
Hos 1:7	Hag 2:5-6	and others...			

*Sometimes the messengers (or angels) of God are identified as God Himself, yet they are also distinguished from Him. These events are called theophanies—appearances of God to man. They point towards a full appearance of God to man in Christ.*

Gen 16:7-13	Gen 18:1-21	Gen 19:1-28	Dan 3:25; 7:13-15	and others...
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## Why is the Trinity not Expressed in the Old Testament More Clearly?

Heb 1:1-4; Gal 4:4-5—

**B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations*, 87-88:** The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view.

## Further Reading

B. B. Warfield, “The Trinity,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1929). Also in Warfield, *Biblical Foundations* (London: Tyndale, n.d.) pp. 79-116. *This is a famous article on the Trinity. Concise and clear.*

T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 260 pages. *Scholar on the Trinity.*

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.XIII. *Calvin has a way of distilling biblical truth clearly.*